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(74) Agents: SCHNEDLER, Steven C. et al.; Carter & Schnedler, P.A., 56 Central Avenue, Suite 101, P.O. Box 2985, Asheville, NC 28802 (US).

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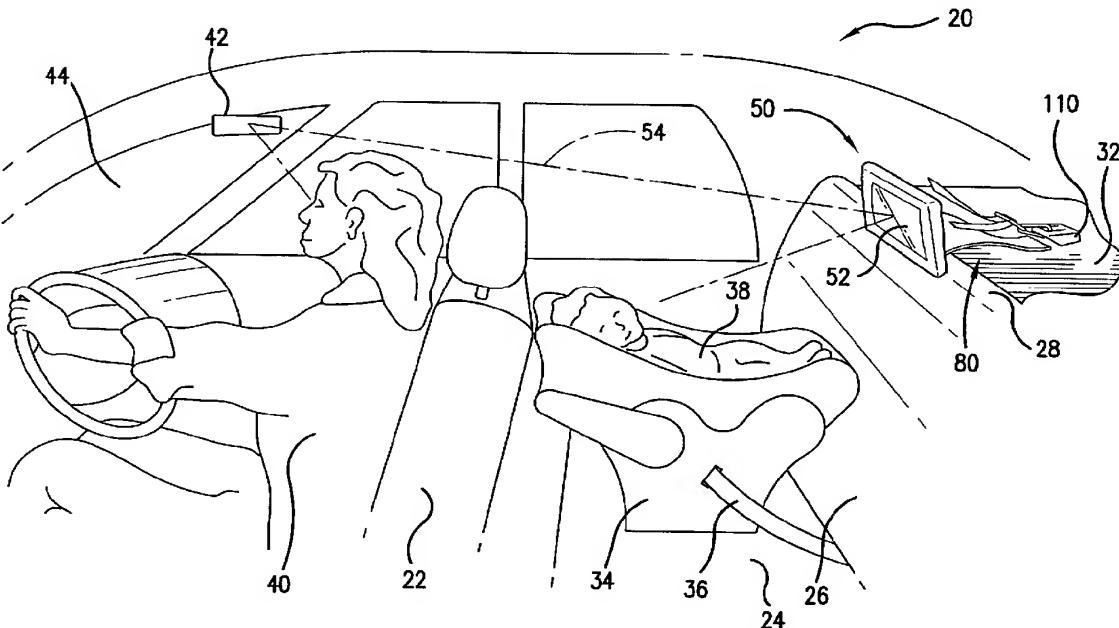
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(71) Applicant: BLUE RIDGE INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTS COMPANY [US/US]; 225 Blue Ridge Parkway, P.O. Box 989, Freeport, FL 32439 (US).

(72) Inventors: DARLING, Sandra, M.; 216 Windward Cove Road, East, Niceville, FL 32578 (US). KANE, Michael T.; 5848 East Lake Road, Conesus, NY 14435 (US).



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(57) Abstract: A viewing panel device (50), such as a mirror device (50) used inside a motor vehicle (20) for observing an infant (38) in a rear-facing child safety seat (34) secured to the rear seat (24) of the vehicle (20). The viewing panel device (50) may be employed in a plurality of attachment configurations, for use with a plurality of possible vehicle configurations. In one configuration, the top tether anchorage point (110) included in newer vehicles as part of the LATCH anchorage point system is employed.



For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

PANEL ATTACHMENT SYSTEM

Technical Field

5 The invention relates to attachment systems for panels attached to seats of vehicles, such as but not limited to mirrors used inside a motor vehicle for observing an infant in a rear-facing child safety seat secured to the rear seat of the vehicle.

Background Art

10 Mirror devices used inside a motor vehicle for observing an infant in a rear-facing child safety seat secured to the rear seat of the vehicle are disclosed, for example, in the following U.S. patents: Cossey No. 4,702,572; Masucci No. 4,712,892; Erickson No. 4,733,956; 15 Harris No. 4,902,118; Gardner No. 4,909,618; Lumbra et al No. 5,103,347; Nolan-Brown No. 5,285,321; Rubin No. 5,576,898; Sorenson No. 6,039,455; Brennan et al No. 6,120,155; Mercado No. 6,305,810 and Monahan et al No. 6,354,708.

20 Very briefly, in such devices, a mirror is mounted near the top of the rear seat of a motor vehicle in such a way that the driver of the vehicle, by looking in the conventional rear view mirror, can observe in the mirror mounted near the top of the rear seat an infant in 25 a child safety seat of the type in which the infant is positioned facing the rear of the vehicle. A variety of attachment methods for such mirror devices have been proposed and employed.

Disclosure of the Invention

30 In one aspect, the invention is embodied in a viewing panel device having a plurality of attachment configurations for use in vehicles including a relatively rearwardly-positioned vehicle seat with a seat back having a top surface, and of a plurality of possible

vehicle configurations including in vehicles having a top tether anchorage point intended for attachment of the top tether of a forward-facing child safety seat, and in vehicles having a headrest positioned over the vehicle

5 seat back. The device includes a generally vertical viewing panel having a front viewing surface and a rear surface. A bottom panel is connected to the viewing panel generally on the rear surface and on a lower portion thereof. The bottom panel has a top surface and a bottom

10 surface that contacts the seat back top surface. A fastener element is connected to the viewing panel on an upper portion thereof. A diagonal support element can extend between the viewing panel rear surface and the bottom panel top surface, and is removably attachable at

15 one end. A tether strap extends from the bottom panel and terminates in a fastener that can be attached either to the top tether anchorage point in a vehicle so configured, or to the fastener element when the tether strap is looped around the headrest in a vehicle so

20 configured.

In another aspect, the invention is embodied in a viewing panel device for use in a vehicle including a relatively rearwardly-positioned vehicle seat with a seat back having a top surface, and including a top tether anchorage point intended for attachment of the top tether of a forward-facing child safety seat. The device includes a generally vertical viewing panel having a front viewing surface and a rear surface. A support structure is connected to the viewing panel generally on the rear surface thereof. The support structure includes a portion that contacts the seat back top surface. A tether strap extends from the support structure and terminates in a fastener that attaches to the top tether anchorage point.

35 In yet another aspect, the invention is embodied in a viewing panel device for use in a vehicle including a relatively rearwardly-positioned vehicle seat

with a seat back having a top surface and a headrest positioned thereover. The device includes a generally vertical viewing panel having a front viewing surface and a rear surface. A bottom panel is connected to the 5 viewing panel generally on the rear surface and on a lower portion thereof. The bottom panel has a bottom surface that contacts the seat back top surface. A fastener element is connected to the viewing panel on an upper portion thereof. A tether strap extends from the 10 bottom panel and terminates in a fastener that attaches to the fastener element when the tether strap is looped around the headrest.

In still another aspect, the invention is embodied in a viewing panel device for use in a vehicle 15 including a rear vehicle seat with a seat back having a top surface, and a rear shelf behind the seat back. The device includes a generally vertical viewing panel having a front viewing surface and a rear surface. A support structure is connected to the viewing panel generally on 20 the rear surface thereof. The support structure includes a portion that contacts the seat back top surface. A tail extends from the support structure and is tucked in between the vehicle seat back and the rear shelf for frictional engagement.

25 In another aspect, the invention is embodied in a viewing panel device for use in a vehicle including a relatively rearwardly-positioned vehicle seat with a seat back having a top surface and a rear surface. The device includes a generally viewing panel having a front viewing surface and a rear surface. A support structure is connected to the viewing panel generally on the rear surface thereof. The support structure includes a portion that contacts the seat back top surface, and has an extending tail. The extending tail has a fastener 30 element on the underside thereof for removably fastening to the vehicle seat rear surface.

Brief Description Of The Drawings

FIG. 1 is a diagrammatic illustration of a vehicle including a mirror device for observing an infant in a rear-facing child safety seat secured to the rear 5 seat of the vehicle;

FIG. 2 is a three-dimensional view of a viewing panel device embodying the invention in the exemplary form of a mirror device, for use with a plurality of possible vehicle configurations, and correspondingly 10 capable of being employed in several attachment configurations;

FIG. 3 is a side elevational view depicting the mirror device of FIG. 2 employed in a first attachment configuration, referred to herein as a "Tether 15 Attachment" configuration;

FIG. 4 is an enlarged three-dimensional view of a portion of FIG. 3, depicting attachment to the top tether anchorage point of a LATCH anchorage point system;

FIG. 5 is a side elevational view depicting the 20 mirror device of FIG. 2 employed in a second attachment configuration, referred to herein as a "Headrest Attachment" configuration;

FIG. 6 is a three-dimensional view, generally 25 from the rear, of the mirror device employed in the "Headrest Attachment" configuration of FIG. 5;

FIG. 7 is a side elevational view of the mirror device of FIG. 2 employed in a third attachment configuration, referred to herein as a "Tuck Attachment" configuration;

FIG. 8 is a three-dimensional view, generally 30 from the rear, of the mirror device employed in the "Tuck Attachment" configuration of FIG. 7;

FIG. 9 is a side elevational view of the mirror device of FIG. 2 employed in a fourth attachment 35 configuration, referred to herein as a "Fastener Attachment" configuration; and

FIG. 10 is a three-dimensional view, generally from the rear, of the mirror device employed in the "Fastener Attachment" configuration of FIG. 9.

Best Mode for Carrying Out Invention

5 Referring first to FIG. 1, represented is a vehicle 20 in the form of an automobile 20 including a front vehicle seat 22 and a rearwardly-positioned vehicle seat 24. In FIG. 1 the seat 24 is the rear vehicle seat, since there are only front and rear seats and no 10 intermediate seats in the particular vehicle 20 of FIG. 1.

15 The rear vehicle seat 24 has a seat back 26 with a top surface 28. Behind the seat back 26, and extending up to a rear window (not shown), is a rear shelf 32, which also may be referred to as a rear filler panel 32.

20 On and secured to the rear vehicle seat 24 is a rear-facing child safety seat 34 secured by a seatbelt assembly 36 in conventional manner. An infant 38 is seated in the child safety seat 34.

25 In the front vehicle seat 24 is a driver 40, who may wish to observe the infant 38. A conventional rear view mirror 42 is attached to the vehicle front windshield 44, but this rear view mirror 42 alone is not sufficient for observing the infant 38, since the infant 38 is facing the rear.

30 Accordingly, and as noted hereinabove, a variety of mirror devices have been proposed, generally in the form of a mirror mounted in some manner near the top of the rear seat 24 in such a way that the driver 40 can observe the infant 38 by looking in the rear view mirror 42.

35 A mirror device of this general type and embodying the invention is designated 50. In FIG. 1, the mirror device 50 is shown by way of example in one of its several possible attachment configurations, in particular

the "Tether Attachment" configuration described hereinbelow in detail with reference to FIGS. 3 and 4. The mirror device 50 includes a reflective front surface 52 comprising a non-glass (for safety reasons) mirror 52. 5 As indicated by an optical axis 54, the mirror device 50 enables observation of the infant 38 in the rear-facing child safety seat 34.

FIG. 2 shows the mirror device 50 embodying the invention in isolation and in greater detail. Although 10 the device 50 is shown in FIG. 1 as a mirror device positionable for viewing the infant 38 in the rear-facing child safety seat 34, such is representative of a viewing panel device 50 in general, which may or may not include a mirror. For example, a viewing panel device 50 15 embodying the invention may include ornamentation, fixed, removable, or both, for entertaining the infant 38. Or the viewing panel device 50 may comprise an educational activity panel.

A feature of the viewing panel device 50 is 20 that it embodies a plurality of attachment methods or configurations and can be used in vehicles of various possible vehicle configurations. Thus described hereinbelow with reference to FIGS. 3 and 4 is the manner in which the device 50 is attached in the "Tether 25 Attachment" configuration advantageously employing the upper tether anchorage point of a LATCH anchorage point system. Described hereinbelow with reference to FIGS. 5 and 6 is the manner in which the device 50 is installed in the "Headrest Attachment" configuration. Described hereinbelow with reference to FIGS. 7 and 8 is the manner 30 in which the device 50 is installed in the "Tuck Attachment" configuration. Described hereinbelow with reference to FIGS. 9 and 10 is the manner in which the device 50 is installed in the "Fastener Attachment" 35 configuration.

Referring now particularly to FIG. 2, the viewing panel device 50 includes a relatively rigid

mirror and backing assembly 60 including the reflective front surface 52, that is, the mirror 52, and a fabric rear surface 64, surrounding a core of polyurethane foam (not shown). The mirror and backing assembly 60 thus is 5 representative of a viewing panel 60, which may or may not include a mirror. The mirror and backing assembly 60 or viewing panel 60 is generally vertical during use, although not exactly so, since the mirror 52 is positioned at an appropriate angle for viewing the infant 10 along the optical axis 54 as is diagrammed in FIG. 1. A bottom panel 66 is attached to the mirror and backing assembly 60 generally on the rear surface 64 on a lower portion 68 thereof. The bottom panel 66 has a top surface 70 and a bottom surface 72. Preferably, the 15 bottom surface 72 comprises an anti-skid fabric, such as a rubberized fabric, stitched or otherwise attached to the remainder of the bottom panel 66. During use, the anti-skid bottom surface 72 contacts the seat back top surface 28.

20 The viewing panel device 50 additionally includes a diagonal support element 74 that can extend between the viewing panel rear surface 64 at an upper end 76 of the support element 74 and the top surface 70 of the bottom panel 66 at a lower end 78 of the support 25 element 74. The support element 74 is employed in the "Tether Attachment" configuration of FIGS. 3 and 4, in the "Tuck Attachment" configuration of FIGS. 7 and 8 and in the "Fastener Attachment" configuration of FIGS. 9 and 10, each described hereinbelow. The support element 74 30 is removably attachable to one of the viewing panel 60 rear surface 64 and the bottom panel 66 top surface 70. The bottom panel 66 and the diagonal support element 74 together comprise a support structure 86 connected to the mirror and backing assembly 60 or viewing panel 60.

35 In the illustrated embodiment, the diagonal support element 74 more particularly has its upper end 76 hingedly attached to the rear surface 64 on an upper

portion 82 thereof, and is accordingly permanently attached on the upper portion 82 of the rear surface 64 of the mirror and backing assembly 60. The support element 74 extends diagonally during use between the 5 upper portion 82 and the top surface 70 of the bottom panel 66. The support element 74 at its lower end 78 has a flap 84. Secured to the underside of the flap 84 is a strip 86 of an element of a hook-and-loop fastener system (e.g. Velcro®), in particular the "hook" element 86. The 10 top surface 70 of the bottom panel 66 is of a fabric pile material and serves as the "loop" element of the hook-and-loop fastener system at substantially any point along the top surface 70. The support element 74 generally comprises fabric surrounding a core of a soft 15 plastic material such as plastic regrind, and is sufficiently stiff to provide structural integrity.

Also attached or connected to the mirror and backing assembly 60 or viewing panel 60 on the upper portion 78 of the rear surface 64 is a fastener element 20 88 in the form of a D-ring 88. The D-ring 88 is employed during use of the mirror device 50 or viewing panel device 50 in the "Headrest Attachment" configuration of FIGS. 5 and 6, described hereinbelow.

Attached to and extending rearwardly from the 25 bottom panel 66 of the support structure 86 is a tether strap 90. At its free or distal end 92 the tether strap 90 terminates in a length-adjustment buckle 94 and a fastener 96 in the form of a J-Hook 96. The tether strap 90 and J-Hook 96 are employed during use of the mirror 30 device 50 or viewing panel device 50 in the "Tether Attachment" configuration of FIGS. 3 and 4 and in the "Headrest Attachment" configuration of FIGS. 5 and 6, each described hereinbelow.

The bottom panel 66 also has an extending tail 35 98. At the distal end 100 of the extending tail, on the underside thereof, is a strip 102 of an element 102 of a hook-and-loop fastener system (e.g. Velcro®), such as the

"hook" element 102. The extending tail 98 is employed during use of the mirror device 50 or viewing panel device 50 in the "Tuck Attachment" configuration of FIGS. 7 and 8, described hereinbelow. The extending tail 98 and the "hook" element 102 are employed during use of the mirror device 50 or viewing panel device 50 in the "Fastener Attachment" configuration of FIGS. 9 and 10, described hereinbelow.

FIGS. 3 and 4 more particularly illustrate the mirror device 50 or, more generally, the viewing panel device 50, in the first attachment configuration referred to herein as the "Tether Attachment" configuration. The attachment configuration of FIGS. 3 and 4 employs a top tether anchorage point 110 included in newer automobiles, as mandated by United States federal regulation, in particular, through the National Highway Traffic Administration (NHTSA), as part of the so-called LATCH anchorage point system (Lower Anchors and Tethers for CHildren). The LATCH anchorage points are intended for use in combination with forward-facing child safety car seats. When the LATCH anchorage points are employed, the vehicle seat belt system is not required for the installation of a forward-facing child safety car seat. Such forward-facing child safety car seats can have a tether at their upper end, which cooperates with the top tether anchorage point 110. However, in the case of a rear facing infant car seat, the top tether anchorage point 110 is not generally used in combination with the infant car seat, and accordingly is available for other uses. In the particular vehicle configuration represented in FIGS. 3 and 4, the top tether anchorage point 110 is located on the vehicle rear shelf 32 or rear filler panel 32.

In the "Tether Attachment" configuration of FIGS. 3 and 4, the bottom panel 66 is placed over the top surface 28 of the rear seat 24 of the vehicle 20, and the J-hook 96 is attached to the top tether anchorage point

110. In the "Tether Attachment" configuration of FIGS. 3 and 4, the D-ring 88 is not employed, nor is the extending tail 98. The buckle 94 and the support structure 80, more particularly the support element 74 thereof, are adjusted so that the mirror device 50 is in an appropriate position, and the mirror and backing assembly 60 is at a suitable angle for viewing the infant 38 along the optional axis 54 as is diagrammed in FIG. 1.

FIGS. 5 and 6 more particularly illustrate the 10 mirror device 50 or, more generally, the viewing panel device 50, in the second attachment configuration, referred to herein as the "Headrest Attachment" configuration. In the attachment configuration of FIGS. 5 and 6, the mirror device 50 is employed in combination 15 with a rearwardly-positioned vehicle seat 120 which may or may not be the rearmost seat in the vehicle. The seat 120 includes a seat back 122 having a top surface 124. In addition, the seat 120 has a headrest 126 positioned over the top surface 124. The "Headrest Attachment" 20 configuration may be employed in an older vehicle that is not equipped with the LATCH system. The bottom panel 66 is positioned over the top surface 124 of the seat back 122, between the top surface 124 and the headrest 126. The tether strap 90 is looped behind the headrest 126, 25 and the J-hook 96 is attached to the D-ring 88. The effective length of the tether strap 90 is adjusted by means of the adjustment buckle 94 so that the mirror and backing assembly 12 is at a proper angle for viewing the infant 38 along the optical axis 52 as is diagrammed in 30 FIG. 1. In the "Headrest Attachment" configuration of FIGS. 5 and 6, the support element 74 is not employed, and can either lie on top of the headrest 126 as illustrated, or hang generally adjacent the rear surface 64 of the mirror and backing assembly 60. The D-ring 88 35 and extending tail 98 are not employed either.

FIGS. 7 and 8 more particularly illustrate the mirror device 50 or, more generally, the viewing panel

device 50, in the third attachment configuration, referred to herein as the "Tuck Attachment" configuration. The "Tuck Attachment" configuration likewise may be employed in an older vehicle which is not 5 equipped with the LATCH system, and which accordingly does not have a top tether anchorage point on the rear shelf 32. In this configuration, the extending tail 98 of the bottom panel 66 is folded and tucked in between the vehicle seat back 26 and the rear shelf 32, and held 10 by friction, aided by the anti skid fabric on the bottom surface 72 of the bottom panel 66. The support structure 80, more particularly the support element 74 thereof, is adjusted, in combination with the particular point at which the fabric of the extending tail 98 is tucked in 15 between the vehicle seat back 26 and rear shelf 32, so that the mirror and backing assembly 60 is positioned at an appropriate angle for viewing the infant 38 along the optical axis 54 as is diagrammed in FIG. 1. In the "Tuck Attachment" configuration of FIGS. 7 and 8, the D-ring 88 and the tether strap 90 with its J-hook are not employed. 20

Finally, FIGS. 9 and 10 more particularly illustrate the mirror device 50 or, more generally, the viewing panel device 50, in the fourth attachment configuration, referred to herein as the "Fastener 25 Attachment" configuration. In the attachment configuration of FIGS. 9 and 10, the mirror device 50 is employed in combination with a rearwardly-positioned vehicle seat 130 which may or may not be the rearmost seat in the vehicle. The seat 130 includes a seat back 30 132 having a top surface 124, as well as an accessible rear surface 136. The "Fastener Attachment" configuration likewise may be employed in an older vehicle that is not equipped with the LATCH system.

In the "Fastener Attachment" configuration of 35 FIGS. 9 and 10, the extending tail 98 is employed, as well as the strip 102 of the "hook" element 102 of a hook-and-loop fastener system. A strip 138 of

adhesively-backed "loop" material is attached to the seat back rear surface 136 in an appropriate position. The fastener elements 102 and 136 together secure the extending tail 98 and thus the bottom panel 66 comprising 5 part of the support structure 82 to the seat back 132. In the "Fastener Attachment" configuration of FIGS. 9 and 10, the D-ring 88 and tether strap 90 are not employed. The support structure 80, more particularly the support element 74 thereof, is adjusted, so that the mirror and 10 backing assembly 60 is positioned at an appropriate angle for viewing the infant 38 along the optical axis 54 as is diagrammed in FIG. 1.

While specific embodiments of the invention have been illustrated and described herein, it is 15 realized that numerous modifications and changes will occur to those skilled in the art. It is therefore to be understood that the appended claims are intended to cover all such modifications and changes as fall within the true spirit and scope of the invention.

Claims

1. A viewing panel device having a plurality of attachment configurations for use in vehicles including a relatively rearwardly-positioned vehicle seat 5 with a seat back having a top surface, and of a plurality of possible vehicle configurations including in vehicles having a top tether anchorage point intended for attachment of the top tether of a forward-facing child safety seat, and in vehicles having a headrest positioned 10 over the vehicle seat back, said device comprising:

a generally vertical viewing panel having a front viewing surface and a rear surface;

15 a bottom panel attached to said viewing panel generally on said rear surface and on a lower portion thereof, said bottom panel having a top surface and a bottom surface that contacts the seat back top surface;

a fastener element connected to the viewing panel on an upper portion thereof;

20 a diagonal support element that can extend between said viewing panel rear surface at an upper end of said support element and said bottom panel top surface at a lower end of said support element, said support element being removably attachable to one of said viewing panel rear surface and said bottom panel top surface;

25 a tether strap extending from said bottom panel and terminating in a fastener that can be attached either to the top tether anchorage point in a vehicle so configured or to said fastener element when said tether strap is looped around the headrest in a vehicle so 30 configured.

2. The device of claim 1, wherein said front surface of said viewing panel comprises a mirror positionable for viewing an infant in a rear-facing child safety seat on the vehicle seat.

3. The device of claim 1, wherein said diagonal support element is adjustably attachable to said bottom panel top surface.

4. The device of claim 1, which is for use in
5 further possible vehicle configurations including in vehicles in which the vehicle seat back has an accessible rear surface, and in vehicles wherein the vehicle seat is a rear seat and which have a rear shelf behind the seat back, wherein:

10 said bottom panel has an extending tail;
said extending tail has a fastener element on the underside thereof for removably fastening to the vehicle seat rear surface in vehicles in which the vehicle seat rear surface is accessible; and

15 said extending tail can be tucked in between the vehicle seat back and the rear shelf for frictional engagement in vehicles configured with a rear shelf behind the seat back.

5. A viewing panel device for use in a vehicle
20 including a relatively rearwardly-positioned vehicle seat with a seat back having a top surface, and including a top tether anchorage point intended for attachment of the top tether of a forward-facing child safety seat, said device comprising:

25 a generally vertical viewing panel having a front viewing surface and a rear surface;

30 a support structure connected to said viewing panel generally on said rear surface thereof, said support structure including a portion that contacts the seat back top surface; and

a tether strap extending from said support structure and terminating in a fastener that attaches to the top tether anchorage point.

6. The device of claim 5, wherein said front surface of said viewing panel comprises a mirror positionable for viewing an infant in a rear-facing child safety seat on the vehicle seat.

5 7. The device of claim 5, wherein said support structure is adjustable.

8. The device of claim 5, where said tether strap is adjustable.

9. The device of claim 5, wherein said support 10 structure and said tether strap are adjustable.

10. The device of claim 5, wherein said support structure comprises:

a bottom panel having a top surface and a bottom surface that contacts the seat back top surface;

15 and

a diagonal support element that extends between said viewing panel rear surface at an upper end of said support element and said bottom panel top surface at a lower end of said support element.

20 11. A viewing panel device for use in a vehicle including a relatively rearwardly-positioned vehicle seat with a seat back having a top surface and a headrest positioned thereover, said device comprising:

25 a generally vertical viewing panel having a front viewing surface and a rear surface;

a bottom panel attached to said viewing panel generally on said rear surface and on a lower portion thereof; said bottom panel having a bottom surface that contacts the seat back top surface;

30 a fastener element connected to the viewing panel on an upper portion thereof; and

a tether strap extending from said bottom panel and terminating in a fastener that attaches to said fastener element when said tether strap is looped around the headrest.

5 12. The device of claim 11, wherein said front surface of said viewing panel comprises a mirror positionable for viewing an infant in a rear-facing child safety seat on the vehicle seat.

10 13. The device of claim 11, wherein said tether strap is adjustable.

14. A viewing panel device for use in a vehicle including a rear vehicle seat with a seat back having a top surface, and a rear shelf behind the seat back, said device comprising:

15 a generally vertical viewing panel having a front viewing surface and a rear surface; and
a support structure connected to said viewing panel generally on said rear surface thereof, said support structure including a portion that contacts the 20 seat back top surface and said support structure having an extending tail;

whereby said extending tail can be tucked in between the vehicle seat back and the rear shelf for frictional engagement.

25 15. The device of claim 14, wherein said front surface of said viewing panel comprises a mirror positionable for viewing an infant in a rear-facing child safety seat on the vehicle seat.

30 16. The device of claim 14, wherein said diagonally-extending support is adjustable.

17. The device of claim 14, wherein said support structure comprises:

a bottom panel having a top surface and a bottom surface that contacts the seat back top surface;

5 and

a diagonal support element that extends between said viewing panel rear surface at an upper end of said support element and said bottom panel top surface at a lower end of said support element.

10 18. A viewing panel device for use in a vehicle including a relatively rearwardly-positioned vehicle seat with a seat back having a top surface and a rear surface, said device comprising:

15 a generally vertical viewing panel having a front viewing surface and a rear surface; and

20 a support structure connected to said viewing panel generally on said rear surface thereof, said support structure including a portion that contacts the seat back top surface and said support structure having an extending tail;

25 said extending tail having a fastener element on the underside thereof for removably fastening to the vehicle seat rear surface.

19. The device of claim 18, wherein said front surface of said viewing panel comprises a mirror positionable for viewing an infant in a rear-facing child safety seat on the vehicle safety seat.

20. The device of claim 18 which further comprises a mating fastener element that is secured to 30 the vehicle seat rear surface and positioned for engaging said fastener element on said extending tail.

21. The device of claim 18, wherein said support structure is adjustable.

22. The device of claim 18, wherein said support structure comprises:

a bottom panel having a top surface and a bottom surface that contacts the seat back top surface;

5 and

a diagonal support element that extends between said viewing panel rear surface at an upper end of said support element and said bottom panel top surface at a lower end of said support element.

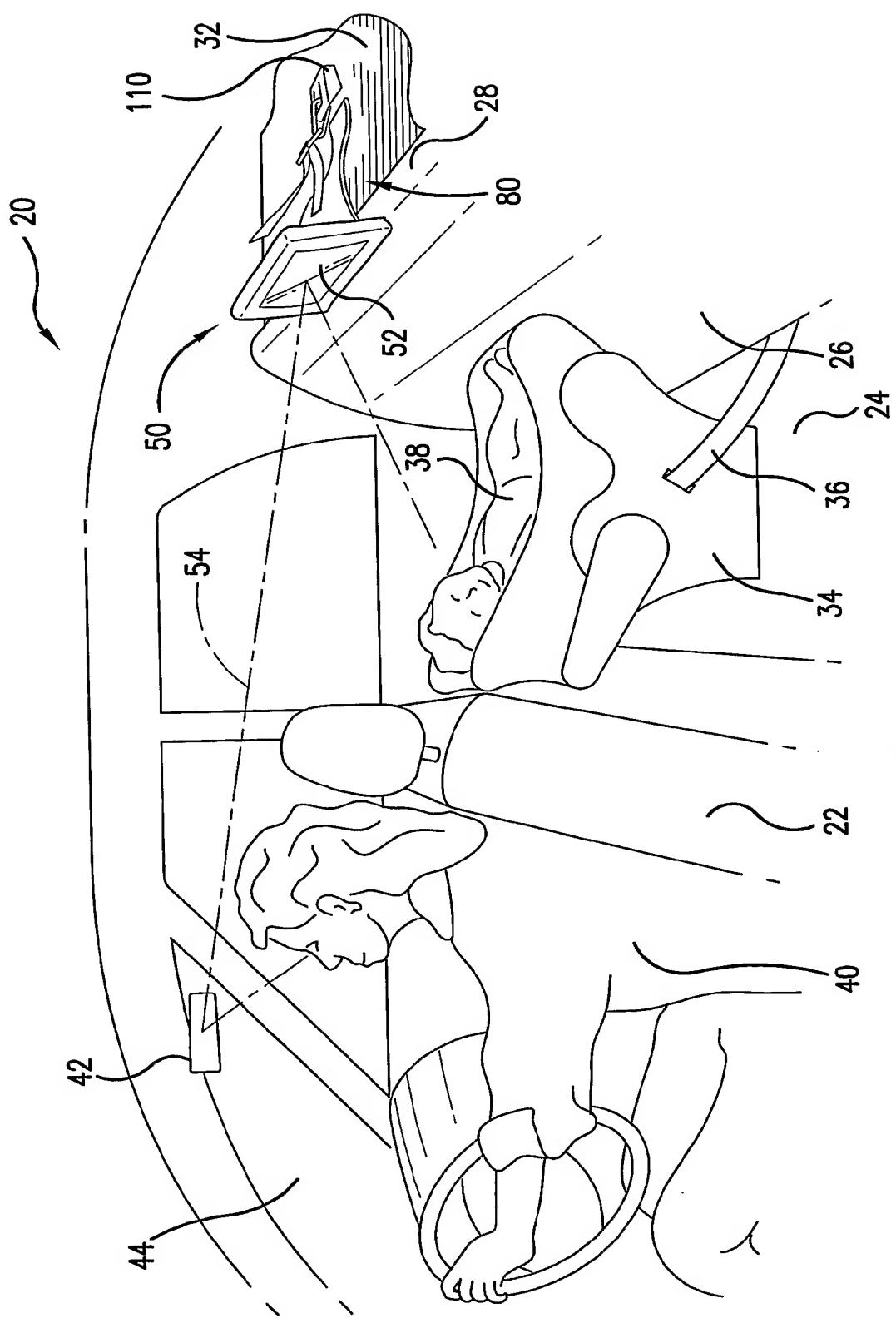


FIG. 1

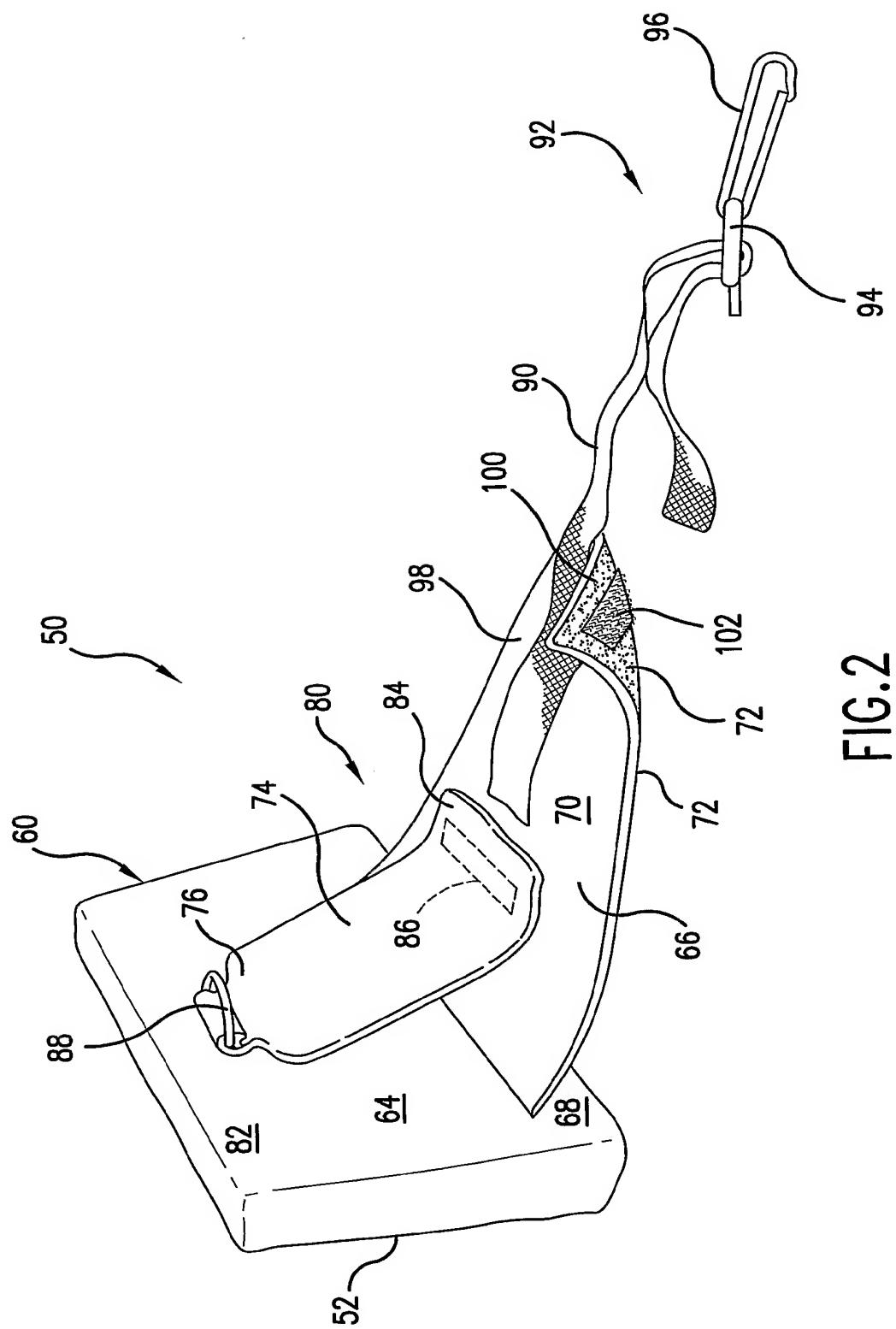
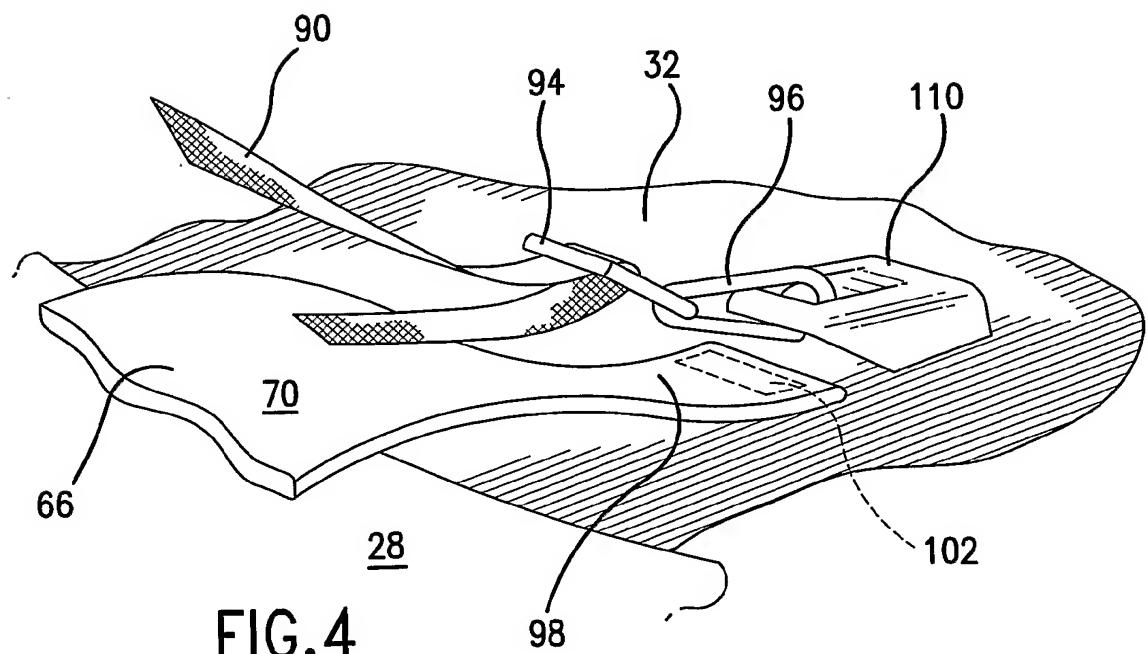
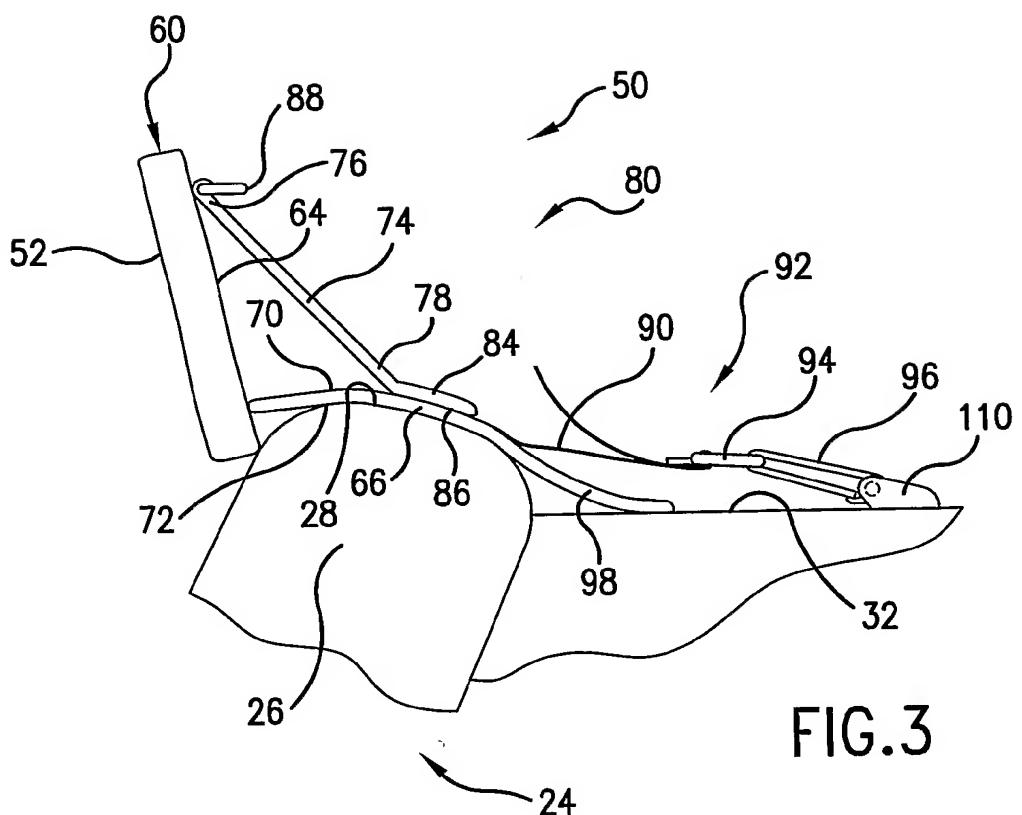


FIG. 2



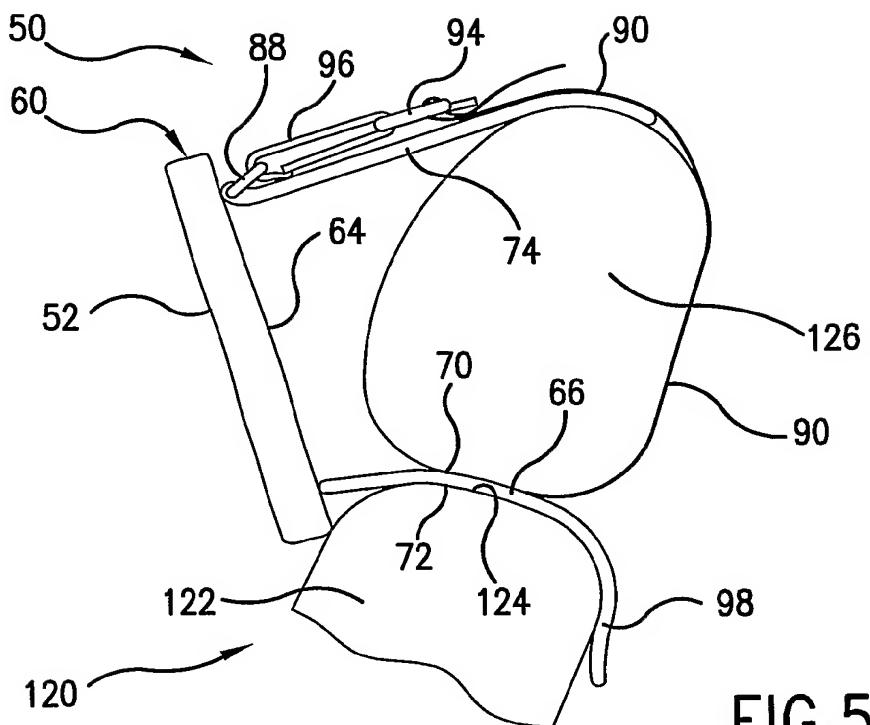


FIG.5

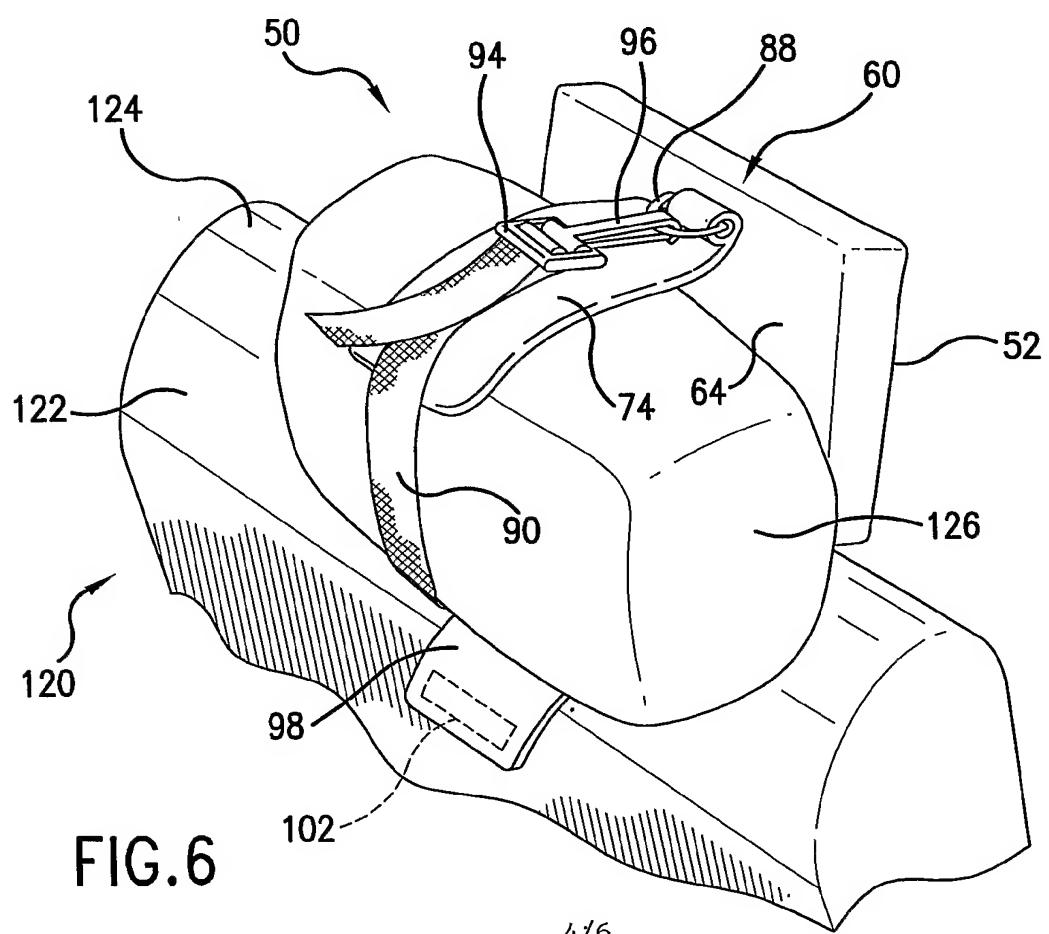


FIG. 6

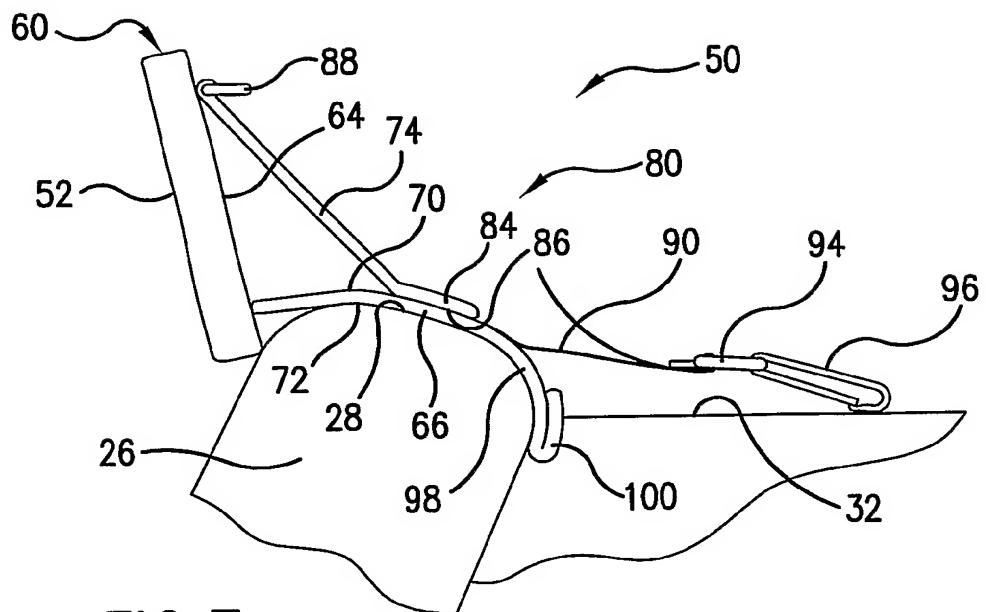


FIG. 7

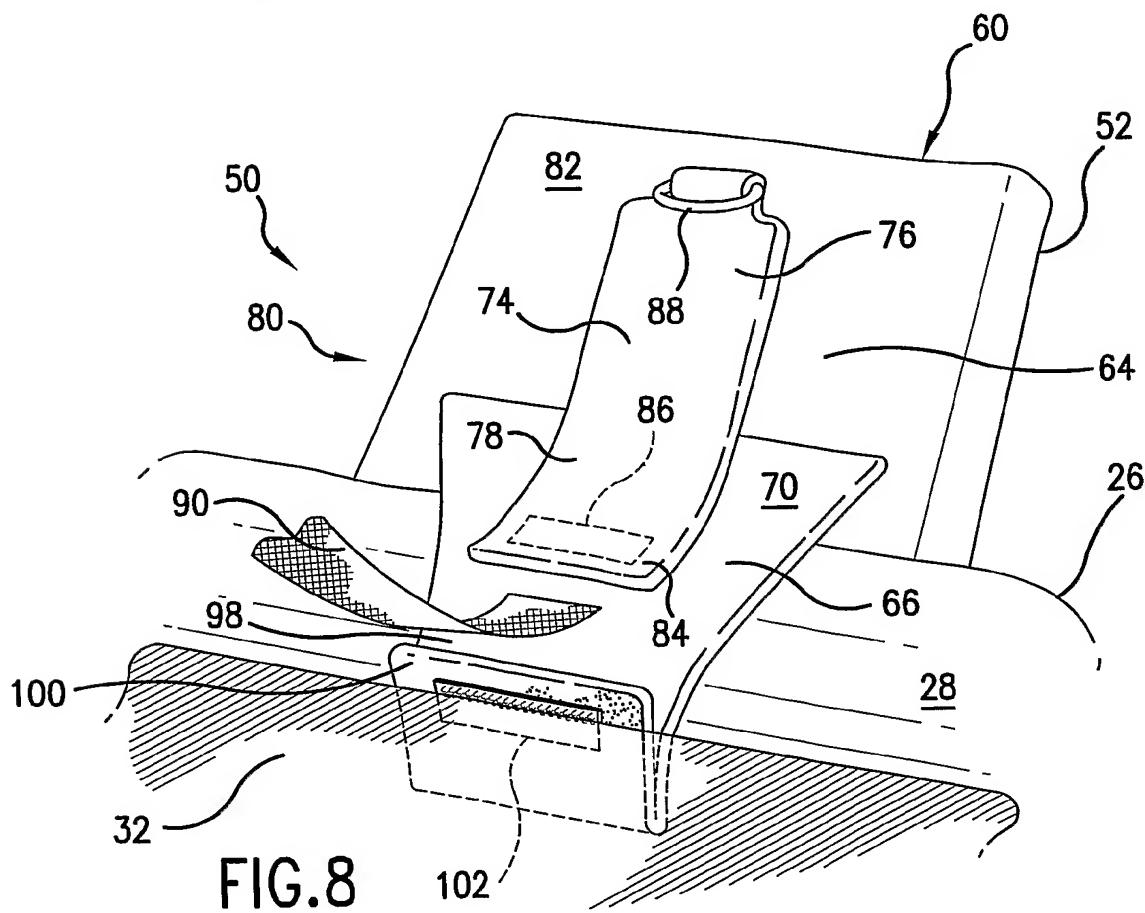


FIG. 8

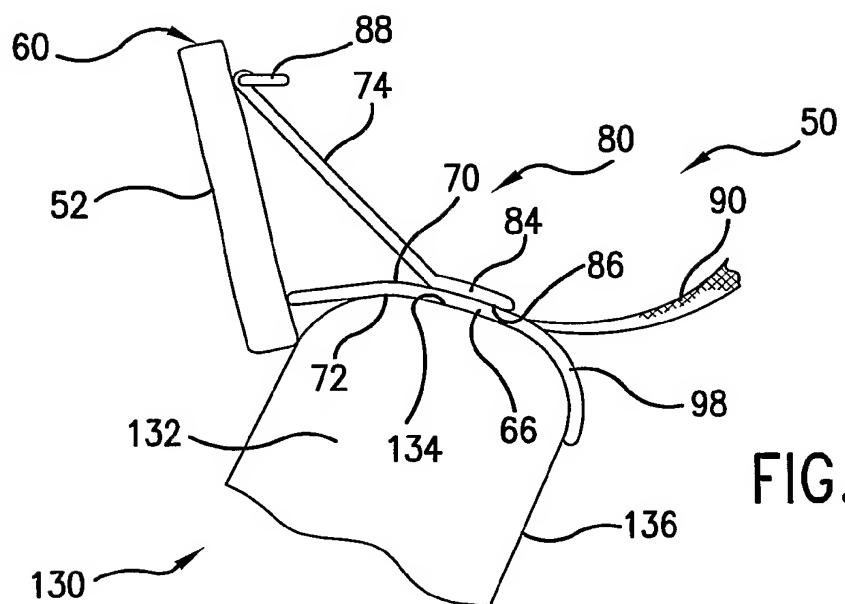


FIG. 9

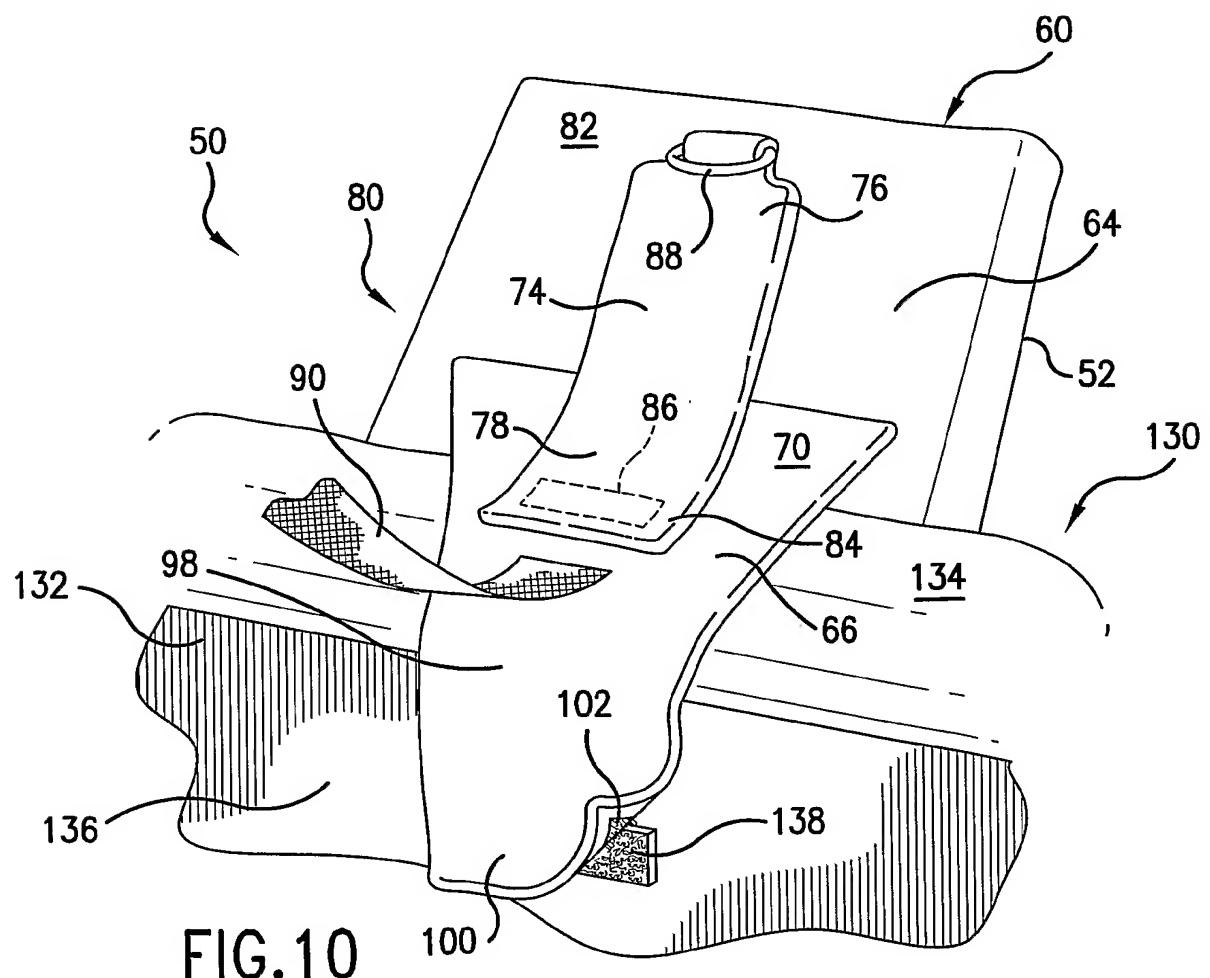


FIG. 10

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Inte...nal Application No-
PCT/US 02/26722A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 7 B60R1/00 B60R11/02 B60R7/04

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 7 B60R B60N A47C

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data, PAJ

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 4 702 572 A (COSSEY JACKIE J) 27 October 1987 (1987-10-27)	14-16,
A	abstract; figures 1,2 column 1, line 65 -column 2, line 62	18,19,21 1,2,4-7, 11,12
A	US 4 383 626 A (WEINBLATT LEE S) 17 May 1983 (1983-05-17) the whole document	1,5, 7-11,13
A	US 5 103 347 A (LUMBRA CLAYTON ET AL) 7 April 1992 (1992-04-07) column 3, line 9 - line 16; figures 1,5 column 3, line 47 -column 4, line 10	1,2,4, 18-20
A	US 2001/008266 A1 (LAMBERT GRAHAM KEITH) 19 July 2001 (2001-07-19) the whole document	1,11,13
		-/-

 Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C. Patent family members are listed in annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

- *A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance
- *E* earlier document but published on or after the international filing date
- *L* document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)
- *O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means
- *P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

- *T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
- *X* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
- *Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.
- *&* document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the International search	Date of mailing of the International search report
12 November 2002	20/11/2002

Name and mailing address of the ISA
European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2
NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk
Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl,
Fax: (+31-70) 340-3046

Authorized officer

Schombacher, H

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No
PCT/US 02/26722

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 4 681 368 A (NAGEL COLIN M ET AL) 21 July 1987 (1987-07-21) the whole document -----	1,2,5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

national application No.
PCT/US 02/26722

Box I Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 1 of first sheet)

This International Search Report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. Claims Nos.: because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:

2. Claims Nos.: because they relate to parts of the International Application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful International Search can be carried out, specifically:

3. Claims Nos.: because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

Box II Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

see additional sheet

1. As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this International Search Report covers all searchable claims.

2. As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, this Authority did not invite payment of any additional fee.

3. As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this International Search Report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:

4. No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this International Search Report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:

Remark on Protest

The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest.

No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

FURTHER INFORMATION CONTINUED FROM PCT/ISA/ 210

This International Searching Authority found multiple (groups of) inventions in this international application, as follows:

1. Claims: 1-13

Independent claims 1, 5, 11, 14, and 18 have in common:

"A viewing panel device comprising
- a vertical viewing panel having a front viewing surface and a rear surface,
- a support structure connected to the viewing panel on the rear surface thereof and including a portion that contacts a seat back top portion of the seat the viewing panel is fixed to."
(these common features are already disclosed by US-A-4702572, fig.2)

The subject matter of claims 1, 5, 11 differs from claims 14 and 18 in

"a tether strap that is extending from the support structure and terminating in a fastener."

2. Claims: 14-17

Independent claims 1, 5, 11, 14, and 18 have in common:

"A viewing panel device comprising
- a vertical viewing panel having a front viewing surface and a rear surface,
- a support structure connected to the viewing panel on the rear surface thereof and including a portion that contacts a seat back top portion of the seat the viewing panel is fixed to."
(these common features are already disclosed by US-A-4702572, fig.2)

The subject matter of claim 14 differs from claims 1, 5, 11 and 18 in

"an extending tail, that can be tucked in between the seat back and a rear shelf."

3. Claims: 18-22

Independent claims 1, 5, 11, 14, and 18 have in common:

"A viewing panel device comprising

FURTHER INFORMATION CONTINUED FROM PCT/ISA/ 210

- a vertical viewing panel having a front viewing surface and a rear surface,
- a support structure connected to the viewing panel on the rear surface thereof and including a portion that contacts a seat back top portion of the seat the viewing panel is fixed to."
(these common features are already disclosed by US-A-4702572, fig.2)

The subject matter of claim 18 differ from claims claims 1, 5, 11 and 14 in

"an extending tail having a fastener element on the underside."

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT
Information on patent family members

Inte
ntional Application No
PCT/US 02/26722

Patent document cited in search report		Publication date	Patent family member(s)		Publication date
US 4702572	A	27-10-1987	NONE		
US 4383626	A	17-05-1983	NONE		
US 5103347	A	07-04-1992	NONE		
US 2001008266	A1	19-07-2001	GB	2358134 A	18-07-2001
US 4681368	A	21-07-1987	CA	1242964 A1	11-10-1988
			DE	3537123 A1	24-04-1986
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			JP	61098213 A	16-05-1986
			NL	8403975 A	16-05-1986
			NZ	213856 A	24-02-1989
			SE	8504908 A	20-04-1986
			ZA	8507883 A	28-05-1986